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ABSTRACT

Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC), the third largest community college in the nation, is tackling the area's need for skilled workers. The number of jobs available in the northern Virginia region increased 103% in the last year. But there are substantial numbers of students at NVCC who are lacking the skills necessary to obtain employment in an information-based economy. The numbers of students enrolling at NVCC with sub-standard English skills are increasing. The average developmental English student at NVCC is white and under the age of 21. These students are equally divided between male and female. NVCC developed the pilot NOVA Gold program with three objectives in mind: to increase student success in the classroom, to increase retention of remedial language students through completion of their remedial program, and to give remedial students an early opportunity to achieve success that will boost student self-confidence. Follow-up research results indicate that ESL and developmental English students, especially males, need goal clarification, structure, and direction. ESL and developmental students both preferred one-on-one interactions with their teachers. Prior to the NOVA Gold program, retention from fall to fall for developmental students was 62.8%, and 67.0% for ESL. With the program, retention increased to 70.4% for developmental students and 82.1% for ESL students. (NB)

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NOVA Gold: Building Skills for Success

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Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) is the public two-year college in the northern Virginia region that trains for transfer to four-year institutions, workforce development, and remedial education. In Fall 2001 NVCC - Woodbridge campus created NOVA Gold, a remedial language program to assist native-born and foreign-born students to achieve their maximum potential academically as they develop the reading and writing skills necessary for college success. These students continue at NVCC and four-year colleges in their courses of study needed to enter the dynamic work force that supports the population of the national capital region.

NVCC is the third largest community college in the nation, the second-largest multi-campus community college, and the nation's most racially and ethnically diverse institution of higher education. It is the flagship institution of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). The college enrolls approximately 61,000 students each year and averages over 22,000 full-time equivalent students (FTES). Students enrolling at the college take either the COMPASS or ACCUPLACER English placement tests. Students now place at the remedial level for both reading and writing at an alarmingly higher rate than in past years. Developmental English enrollments have increased at the college by 29% in the last five years, and English as a Second Language (ESL) enrollments have increased by 26% in the same time period. Of all student FTES at NVCC 15.3% are in remedial language courses.

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There is an extreme need for qualified people to fill job vacancies in northern Virginia at all levels. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the northern Virginia region indicate that the top ten occupations having the greatest job growth are in the information and medical technology fields. The number of jobs available in these areas increased a minimum of 103% in the last year. These occupations require at least an associate's degree. Census 2000 data from the northern Virginia area show that the educational attainment of about half of the

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residents in the cities and counties comprising the college's service region (Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties, and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas Park, and Manassas) is below the level of the associate's degree. The service area's population cannot meet the region's labor demands because of a lack of knowledge, skills, and abilities traditionally learned at the associate and baccalaureate level. Data for the entire Commonwealth of Virginia are similar. The most available jobs require some technical education beyond a high school diploma, and 58% of the state's residents, according to Census 2000, are not academically qualified to meet workforce demands. Robert McCabe, President Emeritus of Miami-Dade Community College, presented telling national statistics in his study of remedial education *No One to Waste* (2000): "Substantial numbers of people will reach adulthood without the skills necessary for employment in the information age. Effective community college remedial education must be there for these individuals. It is their lifeline to the future" (28). McCabe learned that in 2020 sixty-seven percent of the new workforce will be underprepared for or will not enter postsecondary education and will be competing for only 20% of the available jobs suited for unskilled workers (29).

NVCC realized several years ago that there was a need for the college to train residents for area business and industry. The college recognized that more students enrolled at the college with sub-standard language skills. The college also acknowledged that remedial students had unique problems that they brought with them to the classroom. Institutional research data indicated that those students who enrolled in remedial language courses had low retention rates because they had a poor understanding of how to use student support services including counseling and financial aid. Instructors noted for many years that remedial students were the most fragile segment of the population because of learning disabilities, low self-esteem, past negative educational experiences, and lack of self-confidence. From this information a team of instructors and administrators developed a proposal to the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) for funding to instantiate the NOVA Gold program. The proposal was funded for two academic years (FY 2001 and FY 2002). In addition NVCC allocated additional institutional priorities funding to establish the program at all its campuses (FY 2002).

Institutional research data at the college describe the average developmental English student at NVCC as white and under the age of 21. Developmental English students are equally divided between male and female. The majority of ESL students at the college are female.

Forty-four percent of ESL students are Asian, and 22% are Hispanic. Developmental English and ESL students indicated in institutional surveys that they need more information about the college so that they understand the academic culture and that they have many fluctuations in their life circumstances that keep them from pursuing their academic goals. Hispanic students indicated that they need support and guidance with personal economic crises, and African-American students identified that they need to develop a sense of belonging to feel comfortable and to succeed.

The Program

During Fall 2000 five instructors worked as an instructional development team to create courses in developmental English and ESL in both reading and writing that would become the fundamental model for all sections offered. The courses were ENG 001 and ENG 003 (writing classes for developmental English students); ENG 004 and ENG 005 (reading classes for developmental English students); ESL 011, ESL 012, and ESL 013 (writing classes for non-native students); and ESL 005, ESL 006, and ESL 017 (reading classes for non-native students). The courses were created using the Blackboard course management application. These courses were the core of the NOVA Gold retention and success program begun in Spring 2001 at the Woodbridge campus.

During Spring 2001 seventeen sections of developmental ENG and ESL classes, 299 students, participated in the NOVA Gold program. The enrollments steadily increased during the following two semesters. In Fall 2001 450 students enrolled in 20 sections of remedial classes; in spring 2002 527 students enrolled in 23 sections. Instructors who delivered the courses met monthly to discuss student issues throughout. All instructors were volunteers and agreed to participate in the program over multiple semesters. Additional part-time instructors were added to the group to provide for increased enrollments as needed.

NOVA Gold has three objectives: to increase student success in the academic classroom, to increase retention of remedial language students through completion of their remedial program, and to give remedial students an early opportunity to achieve success that will boost student self-confidence. To meet program objectives, NOVA Gold instructors decided to change the way curricular content in the traditional remedial language class was developed and delivered to students. Instructors infused interdisciplinary content such as sociological, economic, and

psychological issues of student concern and information technology skills in the traditional remedial curriculum. While language skill development was constant throughout all sections of the remedial courses, the content within which the reading and writing skills were developed was dynamic depending on the student group profile. Curricular content was student-centered, rather than discipline-centered. Because courses were taught through an internet-based software support structure, students indirectly learned computer literacy from the classes. Students were also encouraged to co-enroll in the student orientation classes required for graduation so that they would learn to navigate the college culture as rapidly as possible.

Implementation and Assessment

In order to meet program objectives, NOVA Gold instructors realized that the identification of learning styles of the target population helped instructors to better understand the needs and barriers to success of developmental and ESL students. Identifying student learning styles also helped clarify additional services needed, modify course design, and integrate student services into the actual class structure. Questions driving program development and delivery were: who are the students, what are their needs, does the curriculum meet their needs, do the courses meet their needs, are instructors' assumptions about their students correct, and what changes or interventions will have the greatest positive effect on student success and retention?

NOVA Gold focused on bringing student services directly to students to bolster their opportunities for success and to provide structure to the learning environment. The program provided a counselor who taught the STD 100 (orientation) course and peer tutors for each class. Developmental English and ESL students do not typically seek help or know about student services. NOVA Gold brought services to students by incorporating orientation (STD 100) and peer tutoring directly into the classes. In addition to merging student services with the classes, instructors brought in technology because students demonstrated a need for structure and ease of access to information. The Blackboard course management application provided that structure.

The first assessment steps in the pilot of the NOVA Gold program (spring 2001) were to quantitatively and qualitatively assess student needs. Assessment instruments used were the C.I.T.E. Learning and Working Styles Inventory, The Noel-Levitz Form B Student Satisfaction Survey, an online Merlot Learning Styles Inventory, the Meyers' Briggs Personality Type

Indicator, End of Class Writes (EOC's), and focus group interviews with both students and faculty.

Assessment activities during the first phase of the pilot caused problems that included a heavy testing load on students and faculty, software program installation and implementation difficulties, language interference with the vocabulary on the assessment instruments, and delayed results that were returned to faculty too late to make timely interventions. Results of the various activities were weighed for their value received versus the difficulty of delivery. From the first semester's assessment activities, data demonstrated trends among remedial language students. Instructors used the findings to alter and augment course content and delivery. Listed below by assessment activity are the results of the data analysis.

C.I.T.E.

C.I.T.E. results revealed that these students, especially the English 003 (highest level developmental writing course) males needed goal clarification and direction. Many students had no idea why they were in college, and many of the upper level ENG 003 males came with poor attitudes. Faculty had noticed this for years. These students felt that because they were so close to meeting the placement score for entrance into English 111 (freshman composition) they did not need extra writing courses. Many students also had earned B and C grades in high school and were shocked to learn that they needed extra preparation for college level work. This caused confusion, resentment, and lowered self-esteem. To meet this need goal clarification instructors added activities and career units early in the ENG 003 course so that students could resolve some of these issues and find their way. Other students received career information in their orientation classes.

C.I.T.E. test results also showed that these students required more structure. They did not like surprises and were not happy with "seize the teachable moment" methods that deviated from the syllabus. Students needed to see every requirement, grading scale, and deadline laid out for them. They did not adapt well to too many changes. Awareness of this need caused faculty to reflect on course design, syllabi, and course delivery. The Blackboard course management application provided part of that structure. Once faculty recognized this student need they changed their teaching methods and set up their courses in greater detail on Blackboard. Students had a concrete location for all of their learning material that was accessible to them 24 hours a day. Once the courses were designed and placed on Blackboard faculty tended to let

them remain unchanged until the class ended. Blackboard provided the external structuring mechanism and formality the students crave.

Students required quiet learning environments. The C.I.T.E. revealed that developmental and ESL students have almost zero tolerance for noise in the classroom. Many of these classes are taught in peer group-workshop modes and can be noisy. Faculty agreed to allow and even suggested that students use headsets to listen to music when they were composing on the computers. As long as the headsets did not interfere with any other student's learning, faculty were amenable to their use. The headsets created a quiet zone muffling outside noise and interference for the students who needed it.

Both groups, ESL and developmental, preferred one-on-one interactions with their teachers. As class sizes continued to rise, the introduction and use of peer tutors helped fill the student need for individual attention. Most of these students required hands-on kinesthetic teaching/learning conditions. They preferred less teacher talk and more hands-on ways to learn. Faculty who relied heavily on the lecture for teaching changed to mini lectures and introduced forms of active learning. A seminar on the use of manipulatives (toys, building blocks, etc.) provided fresh teaching ideas and allowed kinesthetic students to move and use their hands to build or create physical representation of their essays. One result of that seminar can be seen at: http://www.nv.cc.va.us/home/pnarney/DogwoodProject/index.htm.

These students were visually based. To learn they needed to see how something was done. Faculty began to model behaviors more often demonstrating the procedures that students were to use rather than merely explaining or telling them what to do. PowerPoint presentations were introduced as a teaching/learning tool. Students demonstrated how they had constructed and organized their PowerPoint presentations. These demonstrations also met their kinesthetic needs.

Most developmental and ESL courses are taught by female faculty while the C.I.T.E. showed that males students could benefit from more male role models in the classroom. Efforts were made to hire more male faculty and to put male peer tutors in these classes.

The results of the C.I.T.E. showed quite a difference between ESL and developmental populations, which supported the instructors' views that these two groups should not be lumped together for curricular or institutional purposes but should be kept separate. Developmental students proved to be much more oral than written in their learning preferences. Both groups

preferred formal learning structures and situations, but ESL scored higher on their need for formality and structure. Sometimes, an awareness of the student preferences and needs disclosed by the C.I.T.E. made differences in an instructor's approach and orientation to the class, the students and their teaching materials and methods.

Noel-Levitz

One of the summary observations from the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory-Form B that guided the development of NOVA Gold was dropout proneness. The Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory disagreed with logical conclusions, that the lowest levels of developmental classes (English 001 and English 004) would be most at risk; data showed the opposite. The group at highest risk for dropping out was the higher-level developmental student group, mainly the English 003 and English 005 males. This conclusion is supported by the mean of 70 for higher-level developmental males, which was by far the highest level of dropout proneness in the results.

Means for comparative classes on the Noel-Levitz on Dropout Proneness
F= Female M= Male

Preference	LOW ESL	HIGH ESL	HIGH DEV	LOW DEV
Dropout	48.9 F	43.8 F	59 F	56 F
proneness	54.3 M	49.2 M	**70M**	55 M

In focus group discussions, instructors agreed that male students who placed in the highest-level developmental courses were most at risk because they felt that they did not need to be in a developmental class. "They knew that they were better than that (ENG 003 or ENG 005) and could do better than that," reported one instructor. This often led to a negative attitude in regards to the class and their work in it. They did not take the class seriously. Faculty responded by holding open and honest discussions with students during the first week of class about placement into no-credit-towards-graduation classes. Faculty made it clear that Northern Virginia Community College used the placement tests to make sure that students could succeed at the level of class they registered for. Once students were made aware of the rationale behind the testing, they were better able to accept their results.

Receptivity to educators was a second summary observation from the Noel-Levitz inventory. In addition to their dropout proneness, higher level developmental males held negative attitudes towards professional educators as shown by the following mean score of 36.5. All other groups reported higher levels of positive attitudes toward educators. This negative attitude of the higher-level developmental males toward educators further reduced their success rates by magnifying their negative attitudes about their developmental experience as a whole. Recognition of this attitude and the addition of more male role models into these classes improved student success by ameloriating this poor attitude.

Means for comparative classes on Noel-Levitz preferences related to having positive attitudes about educators.

Attitude toward teachers	LOW ESL	HIGH ESL	HIGH DEV	LOW DEV
	74.6 F 53.2 M	43.8 F 49.2 M	56.7 F **36.5 M**	60 F 39 M

Lower level ESL students had the highest positive opinion of educators showing another unique difference between the ESL and developmental populations. In the faculty seminar one faculty member exclaimed: "To the lower level ESL females, their instructors are like gods."

A third summary observation of the Noel-Levitz inventory was self-perception of academic ability. The higher-level developmental students also had the highest overall perception of their academic abilities scoring 62.8%. They believed that their academic ability was at or above the average level. This result bolsters the idea that they felt that they did not need the developmental course even though their scores on the English placement test put them in developmental classes.

Perceived Level of Academic Ability
Self reports from the Noel-Levitz on students' perceived level of academic ability.

Perceived level of academic ability	LOW ESL	HIGH ESL	HIGH DEV	LOW DEV
Average	50%	44%	**62.8%**	59%

Again, ESL and developmental populations differed in their perceptions. ESL students had a more realistic view of their abilities than the developmental students had. In this respect, ESL students again mirrored the general student population at NOVA.

A fourth summary observation on level of educational stress indicated that higher-level developmental students did not take their education seriously and the lack of seriousness was apparent in their lack of planning and preparation to enroll in college classes. Higher-level developmental students waited longer. At 57.6%, they made the decision to enroll in college the latest of any group. The Noel-Levitz did not give instructors the reasons why, but data added to the overall picture of these students and their attitude toward college as something less than a major influence in their lives.

Decision to Apply

Decision to apply made many months ahead	LOW ESL	HIGH ESL	HIGH DEV	LOW DEV
	70.3%	73.5%	**57.6%**	70.5%

All of these preferences combined-- high dropout proneness, low positive attitude for educators, a high opinion of their academic ability, and a late decision to enroll-- put the higher level developmental students, especially the males, at highest risk. In comparison ESL student results were in line more closely with those of the general college population except in the area of finances and social needs. Higher level ESL students, especially the males, felt less secure financially reporting a low of 41.1 as their level of positive feeling about their financial security. The stress about finances would, instructors concluded, detract concentration from their education. Instructors modified the curriculum to provide counseling on finances and financial aid early in the semester. These students, it was felt, could benefit from rearranging the counseling units in the orientation class by placing the unit on finances and financial aid first in their curriculum, thus lessening the time taken away from class due to the worry and focus on finances. Alleviating the focus on money worries as a barrier to their success could improve their retention and success rates.

Simply rearranging units - career first for higher level developmentals and finances first for higher level ESL students - provided each group the kind of help that they were most in need of when they needed that help most. These stressors would most likely cause them to dropout if not dealt with.

Higher Level ESL Males And Finances

Feeling financially secure	LOW ESL	HIGH ESL	HIGH DEV	LOW DEV
Mean	50.1 F 64.9 M	47.3 F 41.1 M	53.9 F 53.4 M	59.6 F 58 M

Instructors also noted that the highest rates of confidence in financial security were in the low levels of both groups. There is no clear cause and effect relationship here, but it was suggested that this might be because these students were working in the pre-September 11, 2002, economy.

All members of the Nova Gold team agreed that the Noel-Levitz yielded useful information about their students and their learning styles and preferences, so team members decided to incorporate the Noel-Levitz into their classes and to continue using Noel-Levitz data to modify and inform decisions about their classes. Also, merely being made aware of the particular issues confronting specific groups of students created a better awareness of their individual needs both within programs and at different levels in programs.

The Noel-Levitz highlighted the differences between ESL and developmental student populations. Previously at Northern Virginia Community College both groups had been lumped together as one for planning and curriculum decisions. The results of the NOVA Gold pilot show that ESL students tested in line with the general population. Their only difference was language. Developmental students comprise a special population that needs different interventions and curricular changes than the ESL group. Therefore, for planning purposes, ESL and developmental students should not be lumped together as one population.

Merlot Learning Styles Assessment

The Merlot web site, http://www.merlot.org, provided a short and immediately scored online learning styles preference assessment. Results of the Merlot Learning Style Assessment

supported the C.I.T.E. results. The test gave students knowledge about their preferred learning styles. Merely knowing the preferences of the individual groups helped instructors deal with the students as individuals, even if the instructors did not use the results to modify their teaching or their courses. The overall and highly positive response of the instructors to the close scrutiny of learning styles and preferences supports a continuation of the project because it has generated so much discussion and change.

Meyers Briggs

Some of the instructors used the Meyers Briggs Personality Type Indicator. The test revealed that most faculty were NF or NP. Most developmental students were STJ. ESL students tested in line with the general population. There were distinct differences between faculty and student personality types for developmental students. Awareness of these differences brought about changes in course design and teaching methods. More structure was added.

EOCs and Discussion Forums

EOCs and discussion forums, called "conversations" in the orientation classes, supported other assessment indications and resulted in a solid triangulation of data by agreeing with national community college studies, the NOVA Gold reports from the C.I.T.E., the Noel-Levitz, and research from the college's Office of Institutional Research. Pilot assessments provided solid hard data for program design and construction.

The data validated some instructor assumptions and disproved others. Faculty saw that students did not like the lecture method of teaching and did not learn best from it. They realized that most of their students were not the same personality type as they, and so students perceived the world differently. The results made instructors much more aware of a need to modify their teaching styles to more readily fit the students' preferred learning styles. Assessment results highlighted the differences between student and teachers and made teachers more cognizant and tolerant of student needs. Reflective teaching and discussions on different teaching styles and methods became the focus for the next faculty training seminars.

In focus groups and interviews instructors agreed that the higher level developmental males often came to class with poor attitudes, did not believe that they needed the course, did not take the course work seriously, and often had little or no idea about what they were going to do with their lives and why they were in college. One instructor said, "Maybe they don't know why they need to be here because they are so close to making the English 111 class and they know it."

The Orientation Program

The goal of the Orientation class (STD 100) was to provide students with better and more comfortable access to existing services at NVCC. Counselors wanted the STD program to be integrated into the classroom so that students connected to the counseling office. In the past, the developmental and ESL students did not avail themselves of all the services; they did not understand many of the policies and procedures in place at the campus.

The orientation program had two parts: the classroom visits and the separate sessions called "conversations." The counselor visited the classroom at least three times throughout the semester. The first visit was to introduce the students to their counselor and give them basic college information – parking requirements, tutoring information and services available on campus. Counselors and students discussed the policies and procedures involved in adding and dropping a class, parking requirements, use of the testing center and other important things to make them feel comfortable on campus. In the classroom, counselors encouraged questions and made references when necessary. The second and third visits were to talk about goal setting or career planning.

The "conversations" were five separate classes where students met for an hour to discuss topics such as study skills, transfer planning, campus/college resources, the career connections and a general open discussion. The classes were listed in the Schedule of Classes each semester with the session dates and times identified. Students knew that the STD class was an integral part of their NOVA GOLD experience and many times the NOVA GOLD instructors used the "conversation" experiences in writing assignments with the students.

What counselors learned from NOVA GOLD is that students need more information about the college, more support and guidance with personal issues, and a sense of belonging. The integrated STD 100 class accomplished that for the students. Students felt "plugged" into the campus. They used services and felt empowered. The ESL students were especially connected to the campus. They felt comfortable in using the counseling office and seeing "their" counselor. They were familiar with Admissions and Records and their functions.

Program Effectiveness

In conjunction with the results of the C.I.T.E., teachers decided to modify their courses and the curriculum to focus on goals clarification and career exploration, hoping that these topics

would help higher level developmental males understand the benefit of the course to them and to their future. Helping students understand why they were in a developmental class and what a college education could do for them, might, the instructors believed, offset the negative attitudes revealed by the Noel-Levitz. Conclusions drawn from Noel-Levitz results led instructors to modify their courses to include goals clarification and career objectives as aspects of the curriculum. Instructors believed that data analysis implied that the retention and success rate of these students would rise by clarifying their reasons and purposes for being in college.

The wealth of information amassed during the pilot and the triangulation of the results led to a streamlining of assessment measures. There were many problems administering the C.I.T.E., and this took too much time from classroom instruction. While the instructors felt than some of the information from the C.I.T.E. was useful, it only reinforced what they already knew. What they had hoped to learn—precise information about kinesthetic, auditory, visual, etc. learning preferences—was not forthcoming because the C.I.T.E. categories were too large and the information was too closely aligned, showing no clear indications for changes in teaching methods or curriculum. For these reasons, the faculty determined that the C.I.T.E. was not a worthwhile use of class time and will not administer it again. The C.I.T.E. was eliminated because it was too long, the vocabulary was too high for most ESL students, and the software was difficult to install and difficult for students to use. The Noel-Levitz was retained as the most accurate and easiest-to-administer assessment. The Noel-Levitz also gave the most reliable information on both student populations, except for the dropout proneness category. Repeatedly in end of semester meetings when faculty were asked to check the validity of the Noel-Levitz dropout proneness indicator, the Noel-Levitz did not reliably predict which students would drop out. Faculty felt that the percentages for entire groups were accurate but that individual reports did not match. The Merlot online learning styles assessment was highly recommended and was incorporated in most of the classes. It was quick, automatically scored, and provided students and teachers with their learning styles and suggestions for maximizing their styles.

Assessment results led to many curriculum and course changes. In ENG 003 classes the goal clarification and career identification came first while units on finances came earliest in the ESL classes. More social and family events were planned for the ESL classes. The C.I.T.E. reported that ESL students wanted more opportunities for socializing with their families.

During regular meetings faculty streamlined the curriculum and their courses by omitting repetitious assignments and merging sequential courses more closely. These changes provided a smoother transition between remedial courses and into the credit classes. An unintended outcome of this integrated approach was the standardization and correlation of English and ESL courses.

The EOCs were discontinued on a group basis, but individual faculty found them useful and added them as an integral part of their courses. Faculty weighed time versus information gained and opted out of the learning styles assessment. Others used a paper and pencil assessment. The student and faculty interviews and forums continue to add a rich vein of information to the program.

Peer tutors from the Writing Center came to classes and worked with teachers on composition skills. These tutors served as bridges to the Writing Center. If students did not have a chance to work with their tutor in class, they visited the center. Eventually students learned to visit the Writing Center on their own and took advantage of tutoring in other classes. Students were weaned from the classroom-based tutor and developed the habit of seeking help on their own. Having the NOVA Gold counselor meet with classes had the same effect. Students, especially ESL students, began visiting the Counseling Center frequently for help with many problems. Training students to seek help from student services was a tremendous boost to retention and success.

Even though faculty continued to stretch students out of their learning style comfort zones, knowing their own learning style and knowing how to make use of it provided metaknowledge about learning. In reflective pieces, students realized that some of their past failures in learning were due to conflicts in teaching/learning styles. They had to make an effort to learn in other styles.

Blackboard provided the greatest aid in structure and organization. Using the Blackboard course management application tended to make course design more uniform and organized. Students had a public audience for their comments and compositions. Quick mastery of computer skills provided gains in confidence and self-esteem. PowerPoint was also used as a method of providing immediate successful experiences with computers. Students saw how the computer skills would help them advance in their jobs or careers. More lines of communication opened via email and discussion forums. This helped remove the feeling of isolation and created a

bonding or family atmosphere in many classes. Technology improved how the classes were constructed and how the students responded.

Flexibility was an offshoot of Blackboard. Faculty had the option of using logging in and completing assignments on Blackboard as the equivalent of meeting attendance requirements. One ESL student had to return to his country for family reasons. While gone he was able to keep up with the class through Blackboard. Students who had to make hard choices about coming to class or fulfilling work or family obligations felt that the Blackboard attendance option was a way for instructors to respect the difficult choices students had to make. Students were more positive about their classes and were able to continue because they could occasionally meet the class online.

A positive benefit of the NOVA Gold Program was the learning community created. Many of the ESL and developmental faculty are adjuncts who do not get many chances to professionally interface with colleagues. Adjuncts also often do not feel respected. During NOVA Gold meetings and seminars faculty performed what one adjunct called "real professional development." The group selected textbooks, a privilege previously reserved for full-time faculty who choose the adjunct textbooks, and created a positive and open professional dialogue on teaching and teaching methods. That positive spirit now infuses the entire NOVA Gold program.

Although these inventories have given the instructors much useful information, how they will continue to use the information will depend on the changes they make in fall semester 2002 when the pilot project becomes actual.

Institutional data indicate that the NOVA Gold program is successful. Prior to the NOVA Gold program retention from fall to fall for developmental English students was 62.8% and for ESL students 67.0%. With the instantiation of the NOVA Gold program retention for developmental English students increased to 70.4% and for ESL students to 82.1%. Success rates on the micro level (successful completion of the course) also increased. Before NOVA Gold 53% of developmental English students successfully completed their developmental course, and 75% of ESL students experienced success. With NOVA Gold 64% of developmental English students and 85% of ESL students successfully completed their courses. The college will look at success rates at the macro level beginning in Fall 2002. Administrators will identify the rate of successful completion of the sequence of the final developmental English

class and both required college composition classes for both pre- and NOVA Gold remedial language students.

Another statistical indication of the success of the NOVA Gold program was in the usage of the campus Writing Center. The Writing Center is part of the college's no-cost student support services. When the NOVA Gold program disseminated information about the Writing Center, introduced the NOVA Gold students to the peer tutors, and encouraged the students to visit the center, usage among developmental English students increased 38% and 13% among ESL students. The increases in student usage validate the partnership between the Writing Center and the NOVA Gold program.

Replicating the Program

Institutions interested in beginning their own remedial language retention and success program like Northern Virginia's NOVA Gold program should include the following key steps in their action plan:

1. Identify a research and design team to create the courses.
2. Secure funding for release time, support staff, supplies, hardware, software, classroom/lab space, and administrative oversight.
3. Review institutional research for retention and success rates, institutional demographics of student populations, student satisfaction survey results, and issues of non-returning students.
4. Identify from teaching experience the perceived student needs.
5. Develop instructional modules to meet student needs.
6. Identify and train teaching faculty.
7. Implement the program.
8. Assess, assess, and assess some more - the program, the instructional modules, student needs, and anything else that becomes relevant during the assessment and evaluation process.
9. Reflect on the program and tweak it for improvement.
10. Plan professional development for the instructors.
11. Form a continuous loop of the tweaking, implementing, assessing, and evaluating cycle for program success.

For further and future information on Northern Virginia Community College's NOVA Gold program, please visit the web site at http://www.nvcc.vccs.edu/woodbridge/chdivision/NovaGold/NovaGold.htm.

Appendix A
Noel-Levitz Preferences for Spring 2001
NOVA GOLD

Preference	LOW ESL	HIGH ESL	HIGH Dev	LOW Dev
Dropout prone	48.9F 54.3M mean	43.8F 49.2M mean	59F 70M mean	56F 55M mean
Attitude toward teachers	74.6 F 53.2M mean	43.8F 49.2M	56.7F 36.5M	60F 39M
Mother high school diploma	19%	25%	35%	30%
Father high school diploma	26%	16%	26%	41%
Hs GPA C+ or above	30%	25%	26%	41%
Hispanic/Latino	45%	25%	10%	9%
Asian	19%	38%	02.5%	03%
Black	04%	11.7%	42.3%	32.3%
White	11%	11.7%	37%	44%
Perceived academic ability				
Average	50%	44%	62.8%	59%
Above average	15%	20.5%	18%	17.6%
High	70%	25%	11.5%	14.7%
Family emotional support	55F 60M mean	50.6F 54.5M	58F 43M	37F 41M
Decision to apply Many months before	70.3%	73.5%	57.6%	70.5%
Financially secure	50.1F 64.9M mean	47.3F 41.1M	53.9F 53.4M	59.6F 58M

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